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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to encourage and assist senior citizen center participants in sharing their knowledge, skills, and experiences through teaching. Addressed in the ten chapters of the guide are the following topics: a strategy for success, needs assessment and data collection, analysis of learner needs, formulation of goals and objectives, involvement of vested interest groups, development of a plan of action for the project, assembly of resources, implementation of the project, project evaluation, and revision. (MN)

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"IF YOU'VE LEARNED IT, YOU CAN TEACH IT!"

A Guide to Planning Educational Courses, Programs and Projects

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INTRODUCTION

This guide was developed to encourage and assist Shepherd's Center participants to share their knowledge, skills and learning experiences through teaching. The planning process can be expanded or modified for application to a variety of settings. A formal background in education is not a requirement for successful programming; you need only yourself and your enthusiasm to begin.

Best wishes to you on your endeavors.

PHILOSOPHY

Through successful achievement of decades of living, the older adult has acquired a fund of talent, knowledge and experience. Sharing with and learning from others is enhanced by age; it continues to be a cause for celebration throughout life. Mature persons motivated to grow, to achieve and to expand their horizons serve as valuable resources to each other. What has been learned and enjoyed is enriched by participating in the educational process of others. The teacher learns, the learner teaches, together they advance and develop.

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I.

PLANNING - A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS

To embark upon a teaching project is to embark upon a joint adventure. The most satisfying adventures for the learners, and for the one who facilitates the learning, are those which are well organized through planning. Planning provides direction for our efforts much the way a roadmap assists us in reaching a desired destination. We may take some side trips on our journey, but following the route we have chosen assures us of achieving our goal with the fewest possible mishaps along the way. So it is with teaching. Time spent in preparation rewards us in two ways. One is by clarifying our own perspectives and the second is by enabling us to provide a positive learning experience for others.

The content we wish to share and the manner of how we shall share it can be organized through careful attention to the following nine steps:

1. Assess unmet needs/identify desired content.
2. Analyze learners' needs and priorities.
3. Formulate goals and objectives.
4. Involve vested interest group(s).
5. Develop a plan of action or program/course.
6. Assemble resources.
7. Implement program/course.
8. Evaluate program/course.
9. Revise program/course as indicated by evaluation(s).

Each step will be explained in the pages ahead. There are many possible variations of the planning process. As you gain confidence in your teaching talents, you are invited to develop a model or a planning roadmap uniquely your own, and to share your strategy with others. What is presented here is

a beginning, a starting place for your future successes. As in all of life, some of the most valuable lessons are learned by trial and error. The same is true of lessons about planning. Enthusiasm and knowledge about your subject will smoothe the way over any bumpy side trips that may be ahead!

II.

STEP ONE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

As you begin the process of translating your ideas for a course or program into a workable format, it is well to "test your market" by collecting useful data. Try to determine the interest level of potential participants.

Knowing something about your future audience is vital to successful planning. Occasionally, the timing for an educational offering may not be right; determining the group's receptiveness to your ideas may prevent disappointments and frustrated efforts.

Consider the following information gathering methods available for use on an informal or formal basis:

1. Direct contact

   1.1 Observation/conversation
   Do people respond with interest to your ideas when discussed?
   Has a similar course or program been recently offered?
   Would your program duplicate an existing offering?
   Can you incorporate suggestions into your planning?

   1.2 Surveys--
   A description of content and/or activities may be proposed to persons or groups along with a request to indicate interest in your proposal. A brief questionnaire can be circulated in classes, in newsletters, in group discussions, etc. You may wish written responses, verbal feedback, a show of hands, etc., to the questions asked.

   If there is more than one content area you may wish to share, the topics can be included in your survey as a checklist for alternative programming now or in the future. Allow space for "write-in" suggestions for new ideas or for modifications of your proposal.

2. Other information sources--

   2.1 Publications related to your interest area or your age group which describe successful learning projects.

2.2 Administrative personnel at the facility where you would like to offer your course.

2.3 Persons who have conducted similar projects for your target population.

2.4 Community and church groups which offer learning series for older adults.

Collecting information, ideas and suggestions is not only valuable to your planning but is also a source for educating yourself along the way. You will be assembling building blocks for your program and establishing stimulating contacts for future endeavors.

III.

STEP TWO: ANALYSIS OF LEARNER NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Having the results of your assessment in hand, your second step will assist in refining your planning process and organizing the information you have collected. Review the responses and suggestions received; compare them to your original idea(s) to find areas of compatibility. It is wise to discard subjects or programs with the least positive response. These items may be introduced at a later time for a better reception by your public. As groups and participants change, periodic re-assessment (e.g. once a year, every two years, etc.) will keep you current about their needs and desires. If you are unable to select a single topic, you may wish to circulate a list of the top three choices to clarify your program selection. Your schedule may not allow sufficient time for this second assessment. If that is so, the list may be saved for use in the future.

Once you have decided the priority topic, it may be given some advance publicity through the means at your disposal within your organization. This will reassure the group you assessed that their information was utilized. It also allows time to generate enthusiasm and increase potential participation.

At this point in your planning, it is of the utmost importance for you to compile a "learner profile." The more you know about the group's characteristics, the better able you are to enhance the learning situation. Some aspects to consider are: average age, sex, educational background, past experience with the topic, physical or emotional limitations of individuals, energy level, usual attention span, personal goals of participants, etc. Your organization may already have this information available to you. Spending time informally among your potential learners and using <u>your</u> observational skills will reward your efforts! Recall

your own feelings and expectations as a learner in the past. Were you not more comfortable and more enthusiastic when the reacher (facilitator) was not only prepared with knowledge about you but also demonstrated that the knowledge was important to him/her?

When sharing a topic with a group, out starting place is the level and the reality of the learners as they come to us, not the level or the reality of where we think they ought to be.

IV.

STEP THREE: FORMULATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

When a topic or skill is thoroughly familiar to you, it is sometimes difficult to know where or how to begin communicating its aspects to others. Steps One and Two have guided you in establishing what will be presented and who will be involved. Step Three will advance your planning journey. Some content areas are so complex that a single course or program will not do them justice and a progressive series may be indicated. If a series is not practical or possible, you may wish to offer an overview or general description of the material you have mastered. In either case, deciding your overall goal is the first focus of attention. This goal will give direction for organizing your content and sessions. Ask yourself the question, "At the end of the course or program, what level of knowledge or performance or behavior is desirable for the learners to achieve?" Another way of putting it is, "What is the major purpose or outcome to be accomplished through this project?"

Once you have answered this question, it is helpful to write down the description you have created. Your objectives will flow from this. Objectives are specifics whose accomplishment, one by one, will lead you and the learners to the goal. By breaking down your content into smaller sections in outline form, you will have organized your material and avoided leaving out something of importance. As in the earlier mention of the "roadmap," the goal is your destination, the objectives form your landmarks along the way. For any class or series of classes, write down your objectives in simple and measurable terms which will assist you, and the learners, to evaluate what has taken place in the session(s).

Objectives are best explained in terms of what you desire the learners to achieve in each session or segment of your project. For example:

Name five artists of the Impressionist style.

Describe the steps required for planning your life insurance program.

Understand the factors causing World War II.

List four cost free sources of counseling for stressful life events in Kansas City.

Recognize the contributions of minority groups to Kansas City culture.

Build a birdhouse from the parts provided.

Write a letter to your representative in support of an issue important to you.

Whether you are offering one session or a series of sessions, define carefully what you wish to accomplish with your group at each meeting. These definitions will be your teaching guidelines and will assist your learners in getting their bearings as to what the course or session is all about. Ideally, your goal(s) and objectives will be available in advance to potential participants. If this is not possible, it is well to go over this information in your first session if it is to be one of a series, or at the beginning of a single presentation.

Adults are competent and goal oriented. They are generally not comfortable with vagueness or disorganization. Leaders and learners share these characteristics. Goals and objectives benefit both as mutually satisfying outcomes are planned and achieved.

V.

STEP FOUR: INVOLVEMENT OF VESTED INTEREST GROUP(S)

This step is optional for you, depending on the scope of your project. It is intended for use when more than your own personal presentation efforts or services are required. As discussed earlier regarding the value of involving your potential learners, the same advantages apply here. If you need additional persons or resources, you would utilize Step Four at this time in the following way:

1. Form an advisory planning group consisting of a representative from each profession or resource you expect to need. You may also wish to include a learner from each group or location for your class if more than one group or location will be scheduled.

2. Share your goals and objectives with this advisory group for increased understanding, concensus and orientation to the project ahead. Acquaint your members with information accumulated through Steps One and Two. Make revisions in your goals and objectives if indicated by the advisory group's recommendation.

3. Through the planning group above, volunteers can be recruited according to your needs. These volunteers may be lay persons or professionals from within your organization or from the community.

If your course or project does not need the above actions, you may still find it helpful to share with others what you have done thus far. Current learners are an excellent source of feedback. If you show your goals and objectives to a sample of readers and they find them clear and useful, you are well on your way to success.

VI.

STEP FIVE: DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE PROJECT

All of the preparation you have done up until now will enable you to handle Step Five with ease! Your desired results are established and you move towards deciding ways and means to bring them about. Elements involved in this step are:

1. Time scheduling
2. Methods
3. Budget (if appropriate)

After reviewing your goals and objectives, investigate the time slots (hours, days of the week, semesters, available openings, etc.) within your organization's existing schedule. Divide your content evenly among the sessions you will conduct, allowing time for questions and discussion within each session. Because of your broad knowledge about the topic and your enthusiasm for sharing the information, it is well to be thoughtful about not planning too much content per meeting. Adult learners are not keen on lengthy, rapidly delivered lectures which cover excessive amounts of facts. They generally prefer being able to enter into presentations and to relate their own experiences to the subject matter. Quality, not quantity, is the watchword. With some experience yourself, you will be able to gauge the appropriate amount of material to be planned for each session as well as for each course or project. You will develop a pace that is comfortable for you and your group(s).

Hundreds of books have been written about teaching methods. There is no single "best" way to promote learning. Knowing yourself and knowing your learners are the main guideposts. Keep it moving, keep it interesting and use variety when possible. You may talk, demonstrate, employ audiovisual aids, use a blackboard (a visual aid), explain, question, request return demonstrations or performances from one, some or all participants, give out problems to be worked in the session, or employ any other creative strategies to accomplish your purpose. If a session seems to get bogged

down, discuss with the group and ask for suggestions as to what would be more desireable in their view. Above all else, adult learners respond to being treated as adults and not as children. You will learn much about successful teaching from them and with them if you remain flexible and open -- and treat them as you would like to be treated if your situations were reversed. It works!!

Budget may or may not be an issue for you to consider. This will depend on whether or not funding is needed for your project. Negotiations for expenses are best dealt with directly through your sponsoring organization. If you need materials or equipment for your project, it is wise to budget fifteen percent over estimated costs to allow for unexpected contingencies and expenses. If your endeavor is offered on a volunteer basis, consider the costs to yourself and your ability to manage them when planning how you will present your material. Money is not always a necessity for courses or projects but when it is, plan ahead and negotiate costs. Financial restrictions which are not anticipated can create headaches for you as well as many frustrations which may interrupt your progress. Do check this aspect out before putting your final plans into action.

When this fifth planning step is completed, you are headed into the homestretch of accomplishment!

VII.

STEP SIX: ASSEMBLING RESOURCES

At this point, after attending to Step Five, you are in a position to know what you need and when you will need it. Your resource requirements may consist of guest speakers, equipment for showing movies or slides, a blackboard, pictures, graphs, handouts, lighting or other "special effects." If there is a budget involved, this is also the time to confirm your actual or potential expenditures and income expectations, if any.

As you arrange what will be necessary, try to provide for "back up" resources. Last minute contingencies, equipment problems or scheduling mishaps can create awkward, often embarrassing moments. Tour the facility and familiarize yourself with the room you will be using. Is there enough light? Can the temperature be controlled? Is the space sufficient for your activities? Are chairs, tables, etc. in good repair and comfortably arranged? Are rest rooms nearby? Is there safe access for persons with visual or other impairments? What is the fire drill procedure? Are exits clearly marked and doors freely operated? Is the placement of electrical outlets convenient for any equipment you will be using? Is ventilation satisfactory? Is the floor free of clutter and other hazards? Is there first aid available? Are there other important details to be checked which are specific to your needs?

Your careful, advance preparations will reward you and your participants. You can be relaxed and confident on the day(s) of your session(s), set to do your best. Your group will respect and appreciate your efforts to provide a safe, comfortable, well organized, positive learning experience. Prepared is preferred!

VIII.

STEP SEVEN: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Your faithfulness to the planning process thus far allows this section to contain only four short phrases:

Adhere to your schedule, calendar and plans.

Be confident of your competence.

Communicate your concent.

Deliver what has been publicized.

A, B, C, D -- period!

IX.

STEP EIGHT: PROJECT EVALUATION

Once again, your earlier preparation will pay a dividend as you carry out this significant step. Evaluation is given specific explanation here as a separate step, yet it is present throughout the entire planning process. Whether your evaluation methods are simple or complex, continuous or applied only at the completion of your project, your basic tools are - you guessed it - your goals and objectives. Refer to them now on the final stretch of your road to success. An item by item review, asking two questions, is the simplest and most direct approach:

1. Was it accomplished? Yes? No?
2. If "no," why not?

This information can be obtained in several ways depending upon what is practical and possible in your situation. You may conduct your evaluation through devising a written form to be completed by participants. In this manner, the outcomes and the methods of your project will be identified. What was successful and productive can be retained for future program use. What did not contribute to success can be analyzed as to why the desired results were not achieved and what changes are indicated.

Progress in learning or change within the participants is evaluated by comparing what you knew about them from your initial assessment (Step Two) and what you know about them now. This kind of comparison is more informative in projects which involve several sessions over extended periods of time. You may also wish to re-evaluate your group after a few months to discover whether the change or the knowledge has endured.

From the beginning to the end of your program or course, be alert to how things seem to be progressing. Encourage your participants to express themselves and their

reactions. Your own eyes and ears will gather a wealth of information which will indicate whether a change in strategy is needed. Being sensitive to signals allows for making corrections or changing direction as soon as a problem arises. Leaving all evaluation to the completion of the course is like failing to close the barn door; your participants may bolt with the horses.

If the goal and objectives of this Guide have been met, the results from your evaluation endeavors will reflect the success of your own efforts in planning and delivering a fine program. If they do not, quickly refer the author to Step Nine!

X.

STEP NINE: REVISION

The road to revision is through evaluation. Step Eight, carefully carried out, provides you with the information you need to make any appropriate changes. This information will enlighten you as to what and how much revision is necessary. It is gratifying when the indications are for few or minor modifications. In the event that your evaluation data discloses major problems, repeating the assessment process in Step One is recommended. Based on what is revealed from this action, the full planning process may or may not be reapplied to your situation. Despite the discouragement you may feel if this becomes necessary, there <u>is</u> a positive side! You are no longer a novice. You now have planning experience. You have learned by doing. The ideas, talent, enthusiasm and capability which led you to offering a course or program have been enhanced. Isn't that what a joint venture in education is truly all about?

CONCLUSION

The concept of Shepherd's Center is inspirational and exciting. The participants, however, are the epitome of its energy and life. Those fortunate enough to encounter these vibrant persons come away enriched. This Guide evolved from a desire to contribute something tangible in appreciation for this enrichment. It began, as did the Center, on a very small scale. Like the Center, it grew.

What was to be a brief outline developed into the many pages you have just read. The goal was to recognize and encourage the teaching potential of older adults whose wisdom bears sharing. The objectives were to present a workable model for planning an educational project, to explain each step clearly and to provide a practical reference to be read, applied and refined through use. Your evaluation is invited along with your comments and suggestions.

Thank you for the opportunity to reach out and join hands. Each of us teaches at one time or another, in one way or another but always, each of us is a learner. From you have come beautiful lessons on life.

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